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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION SCORES ANOTHER GOAL (AGAINST ITSELF!)

¶1. (U) In a press conference on January 27 announcing a new initiative "Slovakia: You Can Do It!" in support of civic activism and political change -- represented first and foremost by support for opposition candidate Iveta Radicova -- former Justice Minister and Christian Democratic (MP) Daniel Lipsic did the unthinkable. In his call for voters to support Radicova as a clean candidate of change, Lipsic stated that the former government of Mikulas Dzurinda (which included KDH) owed a "moral debt" to voters because of corruption-related scandals for which no one has ever been held accountable.

¶2. (U) As an example, Lipsic cited one of the most damaging allegations against the Dzurinda government: the inexplicable support of two HZDS deputies for the government which was widely believed to be the product of a vote-buying scheme. Those votes enabled Dzurinda's embattled government to remain in office. Because of a lack of hard evidence, as well as parliamentary immunity, the investigation launched at the time of the scandal (2005) went nowhere.

¶3. (U) That Lipsic's support for Radicova -- which we don't doubt is genuine -- was expressed in the context of this mea culpa backfired immediately. Radicova had become Minister of Labor and Social Affairs shortly after the scandal erupted, and although Lipsic stated explicitly that she "has a clean shield, and was not associated with any scandals, but rather with the former government's successes in social policy." Prime Minister Fico -- not to mention other presidential candidates -- spared no time in attempting to tar Radicova with the old charges. Fico stated that "she cannot say that she has clean 'shield,' she does not. She profited and participated in the corruption of parliamentary deputies. I will continue to assert it repeatedly. And we will ask her about in another form."

¶4. (U) Radicova was a sociologist before she joined the Dzurinda government as Minister of Labor and Social Affairs in 2006. She is widely viewed as having been much more successful than her fellow ministers in putting a "human face" on the difficult reforms that the Dzurinda Government initiated. She only became an MP in the 2006 elections, and there is absolutely no credible reporting that Radicova was involved in any malfeasance during her tenure in the government.

¶5. (U) Fico's cryptic statement that "we will ask her by way of another form" took on additional significance after Slovakia's General Prosecutor, Dobroslav Trnka, announced at a January 28 press conference that he would ask Lipsic to explain his statements, and if he revealed new, relevant information, the General Prosecutor's office would open an investigation. PM Fico commented that "if anybody is buying MPs and openly confesses it after three years, it's something that has no parallel." All three current leaders of the opposition parties (who comprised the Dzurinda government) reacted with fury to Lipsic's statements.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The Slovak political elite was flabbergasted by Lipsic's gaffe. PM Fico and all of Radicova's opponents were just as delighted. Dzurinda's former foreign policy advisor Milan Jesovica told Charge that Lipsic "had" (emphasizing that he was using the past tense purposefully) a bright political future. Radicova spent much of the week combating innuendo about the old scandal. We haven't yet spoken to Lipsic, with whom we have frequent contact, but we imagine that he has been on the receiving end of some pretty harsh words from members of his own party, as well as from Radicova's camp. His unfortunate evocation of the vote-buying scandal completely overshadowed his enthusiastic endorsement of Radicova. Lipsic has run into problems before when he has bruited political proposals that were not well-coordinated in advance. He has recovered before, but this time we think the damage to his career may be serious and long-term.

¶7. (SBU) Comment, cont: This is just the latest, if the most spectacular, self-inflicted wound that this feckless and divided opposition has experienced. In fact, since the majority of each party wants nothing more than to return to government, i.e., to join a coalition with PM Fico in 2010, there is no real opposition in Slovakia. At least no coherent or effective one. Unless -- and until -- the leaders of SDKU and KDH accept that partnering with Smer would represent a betrayal of their core values and voters, they will continue to lose support because their message is cloudy and ambiguous. It's been three years since this crowd lost power; in the words of one particularly pragmatic and principled SDKU MP -- "they need to get over it."

EDDINS